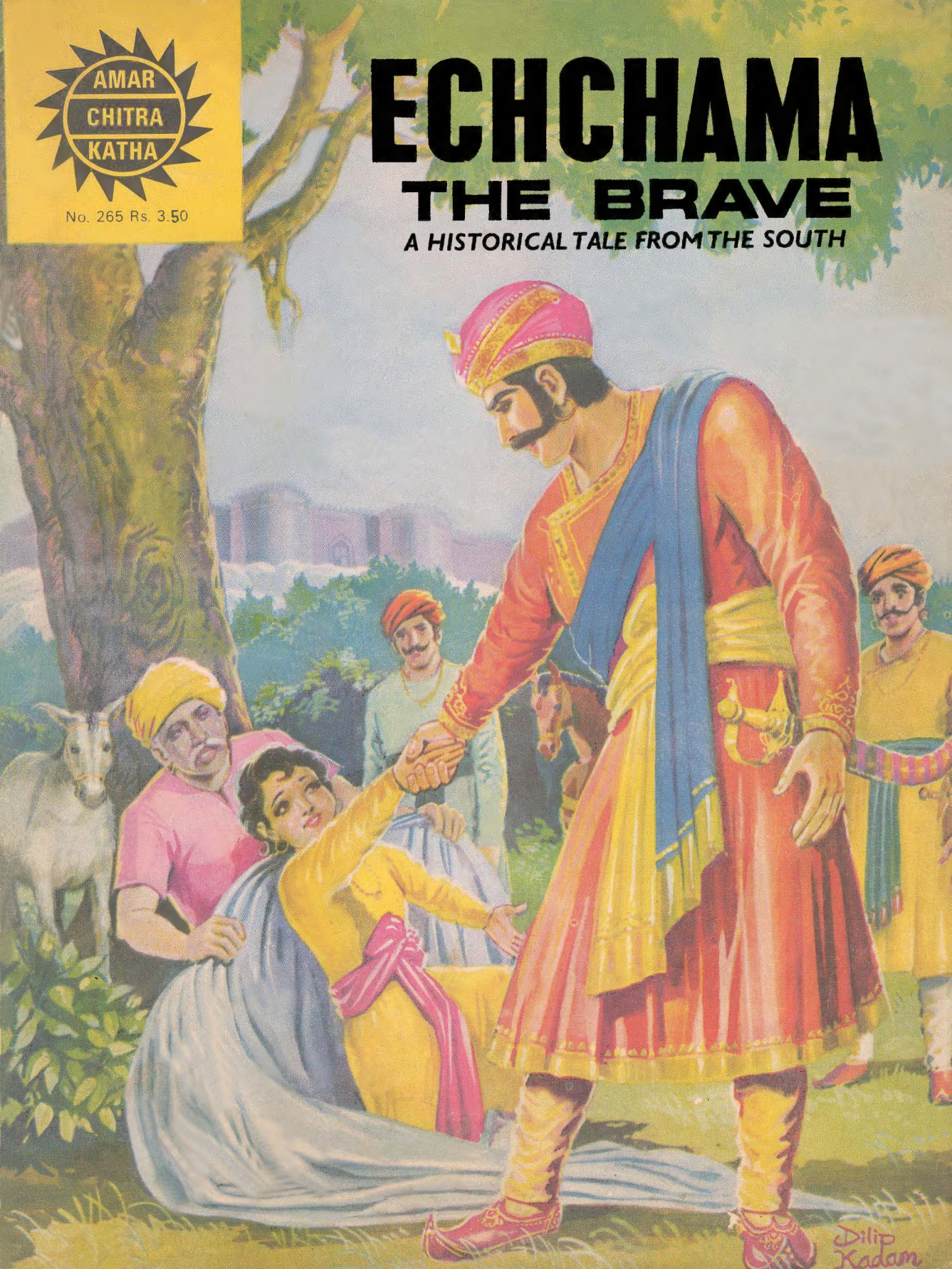
AMAR CHITRA KATHA

No. 265 Rs. 3.50

ECHCHAMA THE BRAVE

A HISTORICAL TALE FROM THE SOUTH



The Vijayanagara Empire disintegrated following the defeat inflicted on its ruler by the combined forces of the Deccani Sultanates in the battle of Talikota (1565). Aliya Ramaraya, the powerful regent, lost his life in the battle. Hampi, the capital, was reduced to ruins. People were highly demoralised.

An attempt was made to revive the Kingdom and recapture its lost glory by the Aravidu dynasty which ruled from Chandragiri, near Tirupati. Venkatapati was the ablest of the rulers belonging to this dynasty. After him there was a struggle for the throne. In the events that followed, Echchama Nayak came off with flying colours.

Literary works like *Ramarajiyamu, Bahulashva Charitamu, Raghunathabhyudaya* and *Sahitya Ratnakara* bestow lavish praise on Echchama for his bravery and fearlessness and his loyalty to his master. Echchama is also known by the names, Pedda Yachama and Yachama Shuradu. His capital was Madhurantakam, near Chingleput in Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka Echchama's name has become a byword for loyalty.

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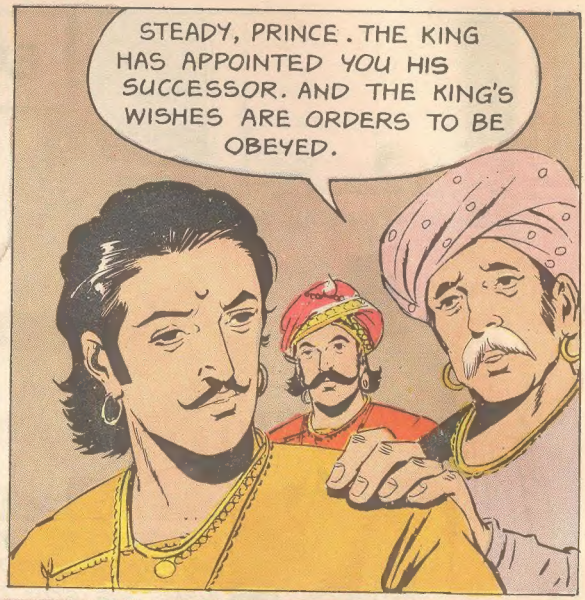
ECHCHAMA THE BRAVE

VENKATAPATI, THE KING OF VIJAYANAGARA, LAY ON HIS DEATHBED. AMONG THE ANXIOUS MEN BY HIS SIDE WERE HIS SON, CHIKKARAYA AND HIS NEPHEW, SRIRANGARAYA.

SUDDENLY, THE KING BECKONED TO SRIRANGARAYA TO COME CLOSER.

WHY IS HE REMOVING THE ROYAL RING?

MAHARAJ! I...I AM NOT THE...



ONE BY ONE, THE NOBLES AND THE CHIEFTAINS WALKED UP TO THE NEW KING AND PLEDGED THEIR LOYALTY TO HIM. PROMINENT AMONG THEM WAS ECHCHAMA NAYAK, THE POWERFUL CHIEFTAIN OF MADHURANTAKAM*.

* NOW IN TAMIL NADU

THE ONLY NOBLE WHO HELD BACK WAS JAGGARAYA, THE BROTHER-IN-LAW OF THE DYING KING.
THE THRONE BELONGS TO YOU, CHIKKA!
AND I'LL SEE TO IT THAT YOU OCCUPY IT.
LATER, WHEN THE CHIEFTAINS WERE ALONE —
EVERYONE IS SURPRISED BY THE KING'S CHOICE!
AND WELL MIGHT THEY BE!
WHY DID HE DENY HIS OWN SON THE THRONE?
WHAT MAKES YOU SO SURE THAT CHIKKA IS HIS SON?

FOR YEARS, I'VE HEARD IT SAID THAT CHIKKA IS AN ADOPTED CHILD...
...ADOPTED BY THE QUEEN, THAT IS. THEY SAY IT WAS DONE WHEN HE WAS AN INFANT.
WITHOUT THE KING'S KNOWLEDGE?
APPARENTLY THE KING DID KNOW OR WHY ELSE...
YOU ARE SILENT, ECHCHAMA.
WHAT CAN I SAY?
IT IS FOR THE KING TO APPOINT HIS SUCCESSOR AND FOR US TO ACCEPT HIS CHOICE. I AM NOT INTERESTED IN RUMOURS!

SOON, THE OLD KING DIED AND SRIRANGA RELUCTANTLY BEGAN HIS REIGN.

JAGGARAYA HAS NOT PLEDGED HIS LOYALTY TO YOU.

AND NOW HE'S INCITING THE OTHER CHIEFTAINS TO REVOLT. TWO OF THEM HAVE ALREADY JOINED HIM.

YOU MUST PUT DOWN THE REVOLT BEFORE IT GROWS, MAHARAJ!

SRIRANGA CONFISCATED JAGGARAYA'S LANDS AND THOSE OF THE OTHER TWO CHIEFTAINS.

SOME DAYS LATER, HE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM JAGGARAYA.

HE CRAVES YOUR PARDON AND BEGS YOU TO ALLOW HIM AND HIS FRIENDS TO COME AND PAY THEIR RESPECTS TO YOU.

WE HAVE FRIGHTENED HIM, IT APPEARS!

TELL HIM HE IS ALWAYS WELCOME HERE IF HE COMES AS A FRIEND.

SOME DAYS LATER JAGGARAYA CAME WITH A FEW OF HIS MEN.
ALL OF THEM DREW THEIR SWORDS AND KNELT BEFORE THE KING IN THE TRADITIONAL SHOW OF RESPECT.
THEN —
MORE OF MY MEN ARE WAITING OUTSIDE. THEY TOO WOULD LIKE TO PLEDGE THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO YOU!
LET THEM COME IN.
MAHARAJ, I DO NOT LIKE THIS.... HE HAS BROUGHT TOO MANY MEN...
SO WHAT?
PLEASE TAKE MY ADVICE AND GET INTO THE PALACE!
I... OH, ALL RIGHT.

SRIRANGA TRIED TO GO BACK INTO THE PALACE.
BUT—
STAY WHERE YOU ARE IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE.
SRIRANGA WAS COMPLETELY SURROUNDED.
ALONG WITH HIS WIFE AND HIS THREE SONS HE WAS TAKEN AWAY AND IMPRISONED IN ANOTHER PALACE.

JAGGARAYA CROWNED HIS NEPHEW KING BUT REMAINED THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE.
ALL THE CHIEFTAINS HAVE ACCEPTED THE NEW KING...
... ALL EXCEPT ECHCHAMA.
WHAT DOES THAT MAN WANT? MORE LAND?
WRITE TO THE CHIEFTAIN ECHCHAMA THAT IF HE COMES HERE TO CHANDRAGIRI AS LIEGEMAN TO THE NEW KING, I WILL GIVE HIM MORE TERRITORY TO RULE OVER.

THE LETTER WAS SENT BUT ECHCHAMA DID NOT RESPOND.
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE IS SO STUBBORN!
IT IS TRUE THAT HE TOOK AN OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO SRIRANGA. BUT SO DID WE ALL!
I ONLY HOPE HE DOES NOT ATTACK US.
HE WON'T.
HE WILL NOT RISK IT AS LONG AS WE HOLD SRIRANGA.
THE BEST THING TO DO IS TO IGNORE HIM FOR THE TIME BEING.

MEANWHILE AT MADHURANTAKAM, ECHCHAMA AND HIS TRUSTED LIEUTENANT, OBALA NAYAK WERE PLANNING THE NEXT MOVE.
I WISH I HAD BEEN IN CHANDRAGIRI WHEN THAT TREACHEROUS JAGGA ABDUCTED THE KING.
MY YOUNG MASTER IS SO GUILELESS. I'LL WAGER HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING TILL THE LAST MOMENT.
JAGGA WILL PAY DEARLY FOR HIS TREACHERY.
OUR MEN ARE READY FOR BATTLE.
A WORD FROM YOU AND...
WE MUST HAVE PATIENCE. OUR KING'S LIFE WILL BE IN DANGER IF WE DECLARE WAR ON JAGGA.
FIRST WE MUST RESCUE THE KING AND THEN PUNISH THE TRAITORS.
HOW DO WE DO THAT?

HERE COME THE SPIES I HAD SENT TO CHANDRAGIRI. PERHAPS, THEY CAN ANSWER YOUR QUESTION.
THE PALACE IS HEAVILY GUARDED. NO ONE CAN ENTER OR LEAVE WITHOUT BEING SEEN.
ONLY TWO PEOPLE GO IN AND OUT WITHOUT BEING QUESTIONED.
THE WOMAN WHO BRINGS FLOWERS FOR WORSHIP AND THE DHOBI!
I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO THE DHOBI.

SOME DAYS LATER AT THE PALACE WHERE SRIRANGA WAS HELD PRISONER—

YOUR MAJESTY, I HAVE COME TO COLLECT THE SOILED LINEN.

TAKE COURAGE YOUR MAJESTY, ECHCHAMA NAYAK IS TRYING TO RESCUE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

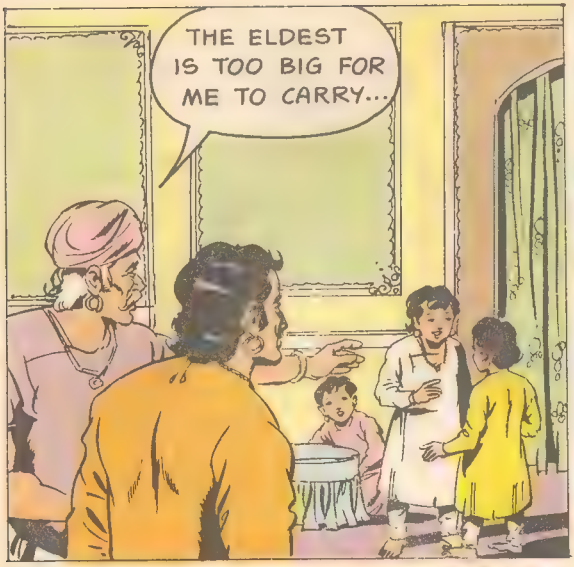
ECHCHAMA?

YES, YOUR MAJESTY. IN THE MEANTIME HE HAS ASKED ME TO SMUGGLE ONE OF THE PRINCES OUT.

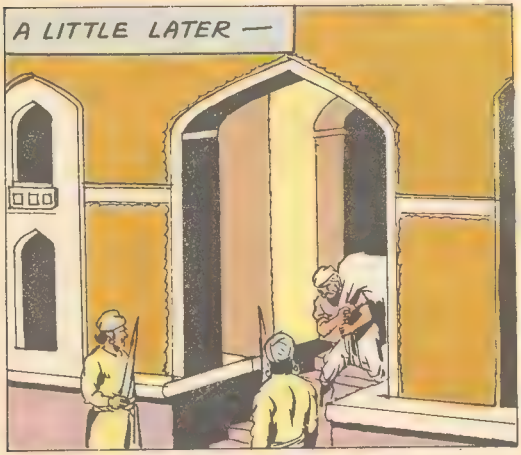
ECHCHAMA'S LOYALTY IS LAUDABLE. BUT...

...YOUR TASK IS A HOPELESS ONE. HOW WILL YOU HOODWINK ALL THOSE KEEN GUARDS OUTSIDE?

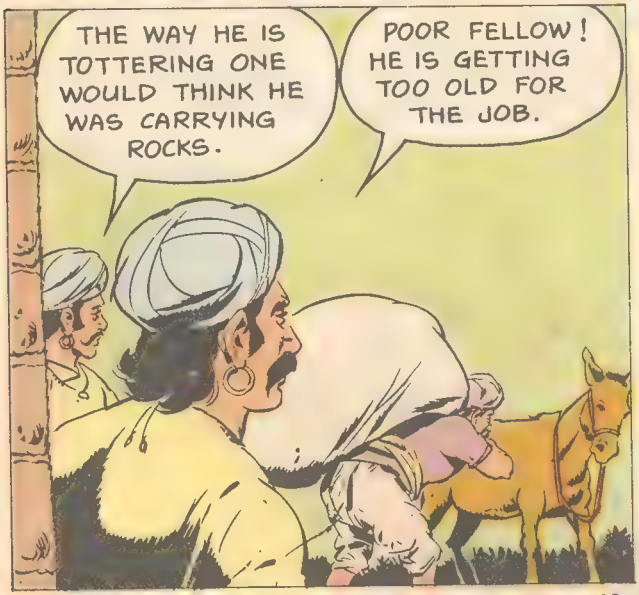
TRUST ME, MAHARAJ.


THE ELDEST IS TOO BIG FOR ME TO CARRY...

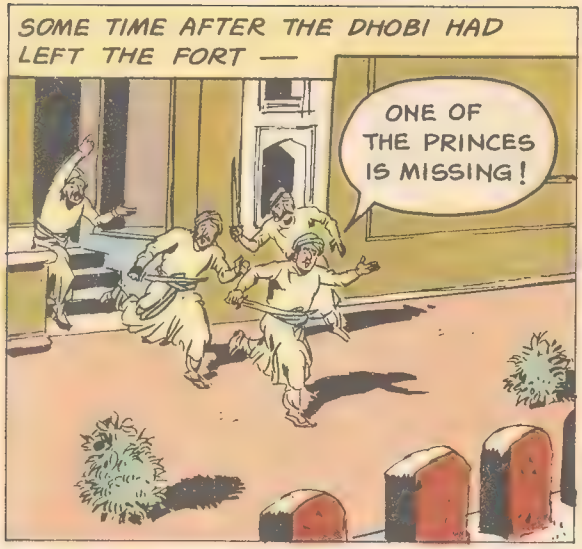
... BUT I CAN TAKE THE SECOND ONE.


A LITTLE LATER —

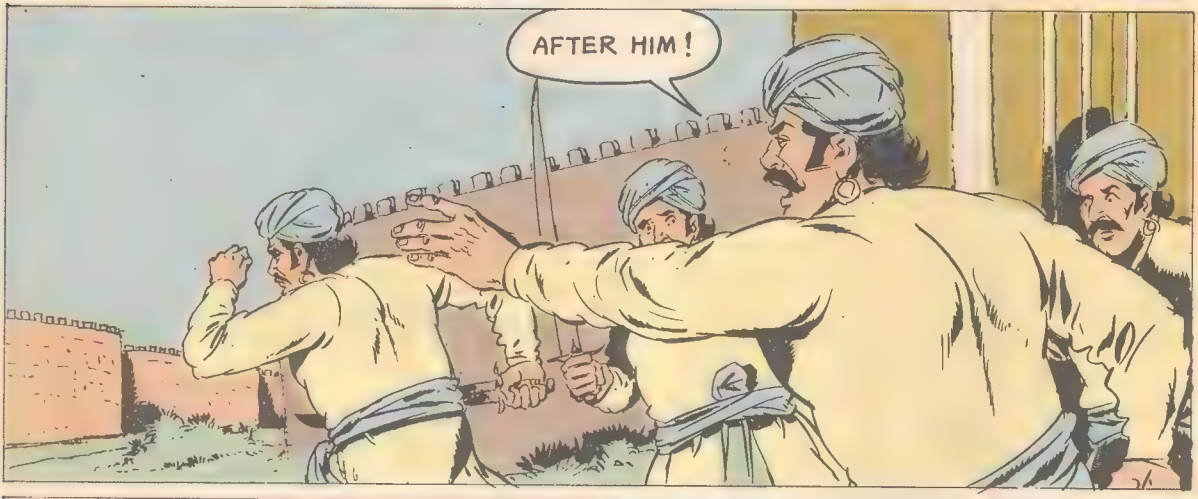
YOU HAVE A HEAVY LOAD TODAY.
ER... YES.

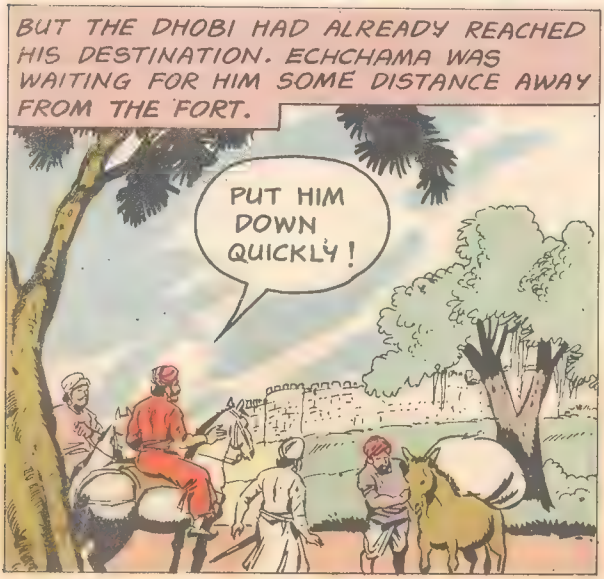

THE WAY HE IS TOTTERING ONE WOULD THINK HE WAS CARRYING ROCKS.
POOR FELLOW! HE IS GETTING TOO OLD FOR THE JOB.

HERE, LET ME HELP YOU.

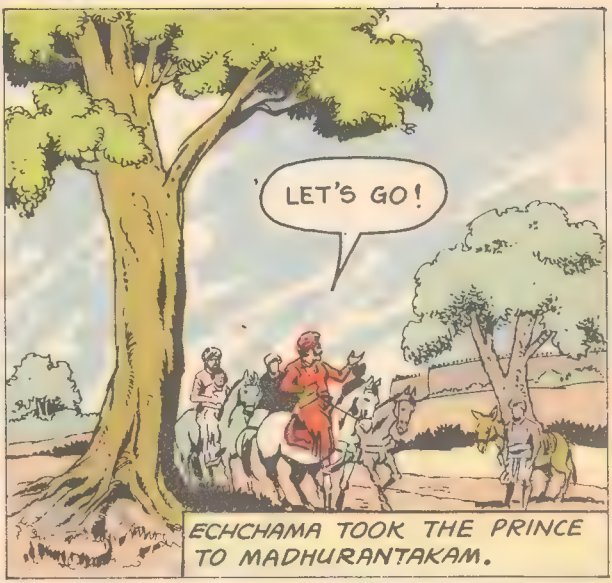

SOME TIME AFTER THE DHOBI HAD LEFT THE FORT —
ONE OF THE PRINCES IS MISSING!

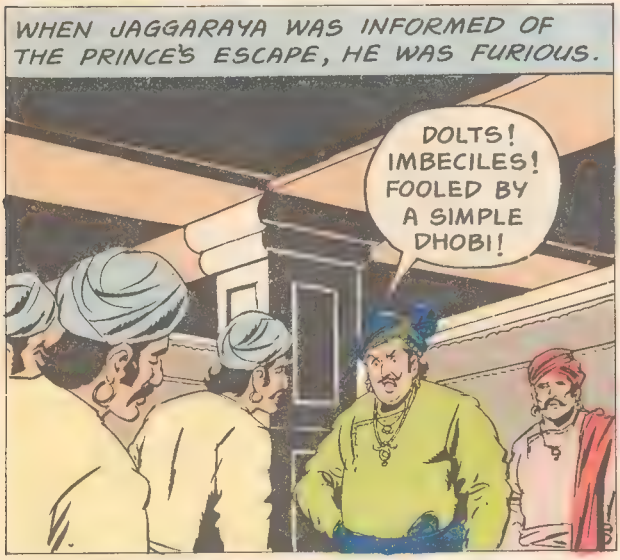
HE IS NOT IN THE PALACE!
THE DHOBI! HE MUST HAVE BEEN CARRYING THE PRINCE!


AFTER HIM!


BUT THE DHOBI HAD ALREADY REACHED HIS DESTINATION. ECHCHAMA WAS WAITING FOR HIM SOME DISTANCE AWAY FROM THE FORT.
PUT HIM DOWN QUICKLY!

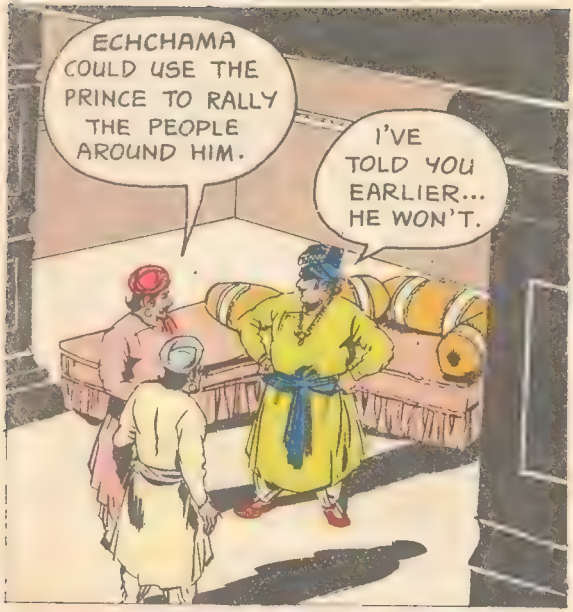
THAT'S A JOB WELL DONE. I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU. NOW KEEP OUT OF JAGGA'S WAY.


LET'S GO!
ECHCHAMA TOOK THE PRINCE TO MADHURANTAKAM.


WHEN JAGGARAYA WAS INFORMED OF THE PRINCE'S ESCAPE, HE WAS FURIOUS.
DOLTS! IMBECILES! FOOLED BY A SIMPLE DHOBI!

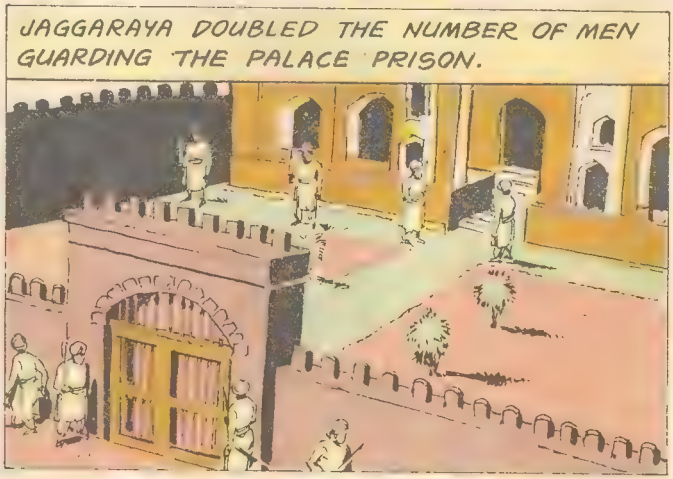
WHY DIDN'T YOU GO AFTER HIM?
HE WAS TOO QUICK FOR US.

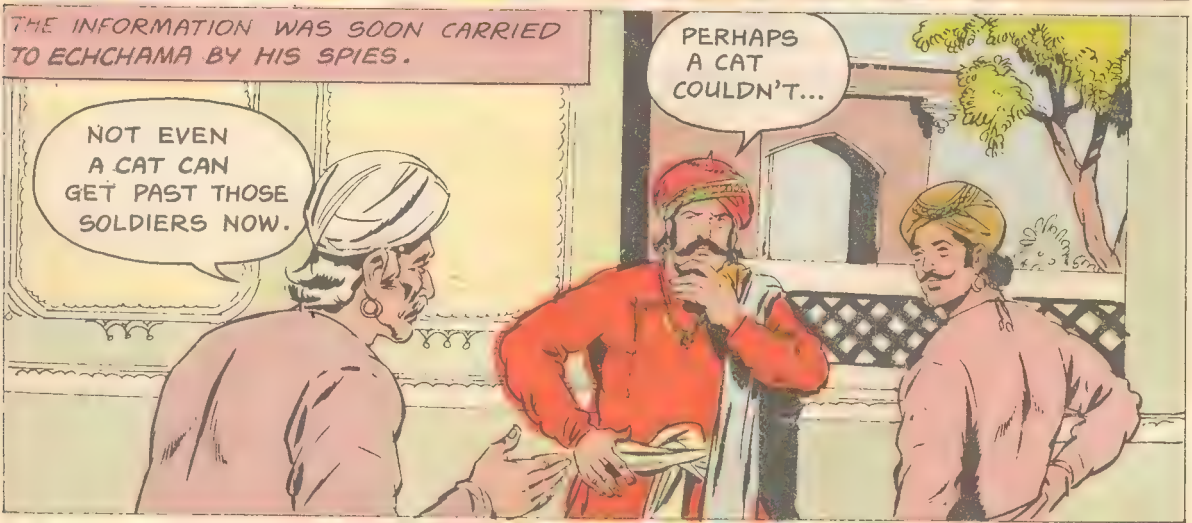
THEN I MAY AS WELL HAVE DHOBIS WORKING FOR ME!

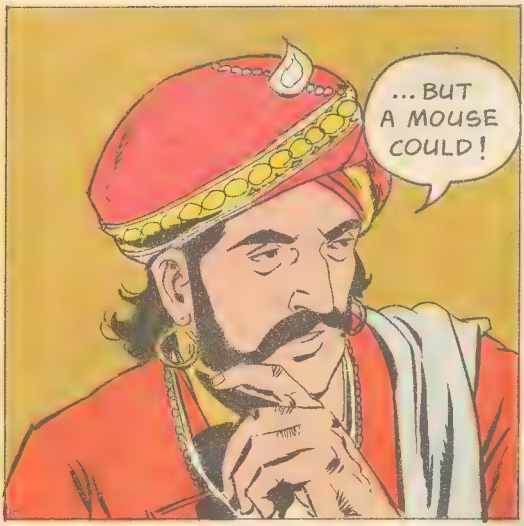

ECHCHAMA COULD USE THE PRINCE TO RALLY THE PEOPLE AROUND HIM.
I'VE TOLD YOU EARLIER... HE WON'T.

HE WON'T DO ANYTHING TO PROVOKE US AS LONG AS WE HAVE SRIRANGA!
HE MIGHT TRY TO RESCUE SRIRANGA.

LET HIM TRY. I'LL BE WAITING FOR HIM!


JAGGARAYA DOUBLED THE NUMBER OF MEN GUARDING THE PALACE PRISON.

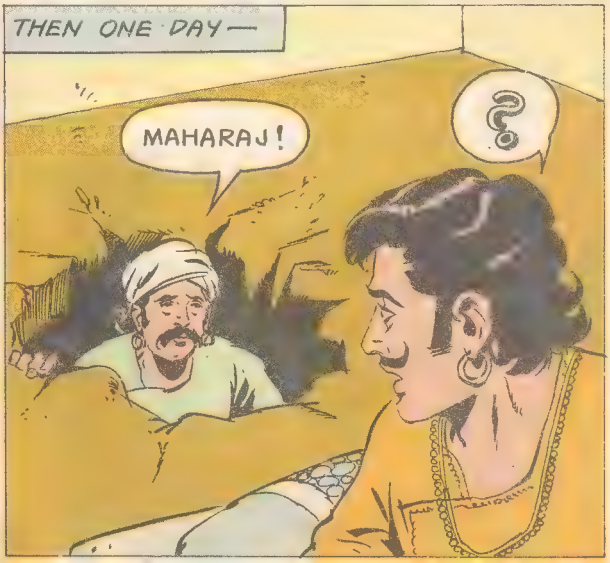

THE INFORMATION WAS SOON CARRIED TO ECHCHAMA BY HIS SPIES.
NOT EVEN A CAT CAN GET PAST THOSE SOLDIERS NOW.
PERHAPS A CAT COULDN'T...


...BUT A MOUSE COULD!

WE'LL DIG A TUNNEL TO THE PALACE!

A SCORE OF MEN BEGAN TO DIG SOME DISTANCE AWAY FROM THE PALACE...

...AND SLOWLY BUT STEADILY BEGAN TO BURROW THEIR WAY UNDER THE GROUND.


THEN ONE DAY—
MAHARAJ!
?

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

ECHCHAMA NAYAK HAS SENT US TO TAKE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY AWAY FROM HERE.

WE HAVE DUG A TUNNEL TO TAKE YOU OUT.

A TUNNEL? IT'S A HAZARDOUS SCHEME!

THE GUARDS HERE ARE VERY ALERT. ANYWAY, I'LL WAKE UP THE QUEEN AND THE PRINCES.

SRIRANGA, HIS WIFE AND HIS TWO SONS DESCENDED INTO THE TUNNEL ONE BY ONE.

OUTSIDE, THE SOLDIERS WERE PATROLLING THE GROUNDS.

SUDDENLY —
AHH!

WHAT HAPPENED?
THE GROUND SUDDENLY CAVED IN UNDER HIM.

IT'S A TUNNEL! SOMEBODY HAS BEEN DIGGING A TUNNEL HERE!
LET'S SEE WHERE IT LEADS TO.

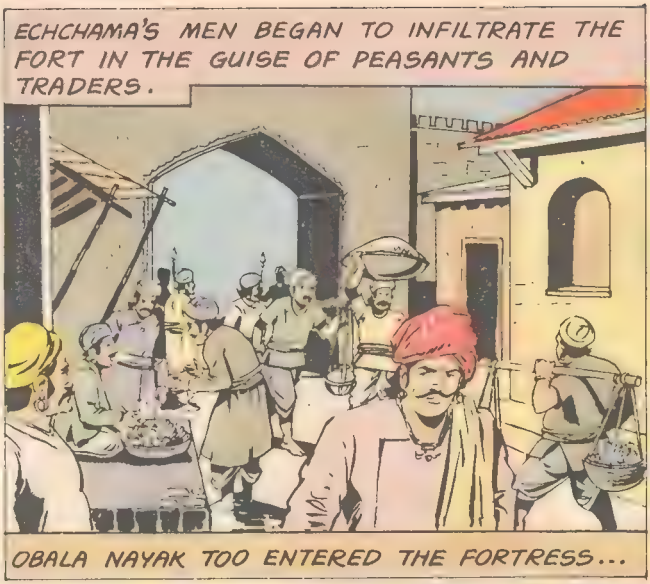
AHHA!

THE PRISONERS ARE TRYING TO ESCAPE... WE'VE CAUGHT THEM REDHANDED.

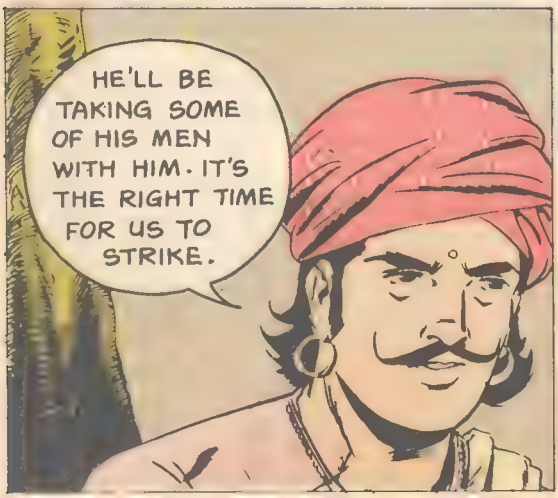
THE ROYAL PRISONERS AND THEIR ERSTWHILE RESCUERS WERE TAKEN BACK TO THE PALACE.
I TOLD YOU WE WOULDN'T SUCCEED.

ONLY ONE MAN WHO WAS FAR AHEAD OF THE OTHERS MANAGED TO ESCAPE.
THEY DISCOVERED THE TUNNEL! THEY WILL SOON BE HERE!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
SHAKEN BY THE DARING PLANS OF ECHCHAMA NAYAK, JAGGARAYA TRANSFERRED THE PRISONERS TO ANOTHER PRISON IN THE FORT.
THESE WALLS ARE IMPREGNABLE.
NO ONE CAN DIG A TUNNEL THROUGH THIS ROCKY GROUND.
BUT IT DID NOT TAKE THE FAITHFUL ECHCHAMA LONG TO DISCOVER WHERE HIS MASTER WAS IMPRISONED.
WE'LL CAPTURE THAT PLACE.
HOW?

WE'LL NEED THOUSANDS OF MEN FOR THE TASK.
NOT IF WE DO IT MY WAY. LISTEN...


ECHCHAMA'S MEN BEGAN TO INFILTRATE THE FORT IN THE GUISE OF PEASANTS AND TRADERS.
OBALA NAYAK TOO ENTERED THE FORTRESS...

...AND WENT INTO HIDING LIKE THE REST OF HIS MEN. THEN ONE EVENING —
JAGGARAYA IS GOING OUT TOMORROW... TO MEET A CHIEFTAIN.


HE'LL BE TAKING SOME OF HIS MEN WITH HIM. IT'S THE RIGHT TIME FOR US TO STRIKE.

PASS THE WORD AROUND. LET OUR MEN BE READY.

THE NEXT MORNING JAGGARAYA LEFT WITH ALMOST HALF OF THE MEN IN THE FORT.

WHEN HE WAS OUT OF SIGHT, OBALA AND HIS MEN ATTACKED.

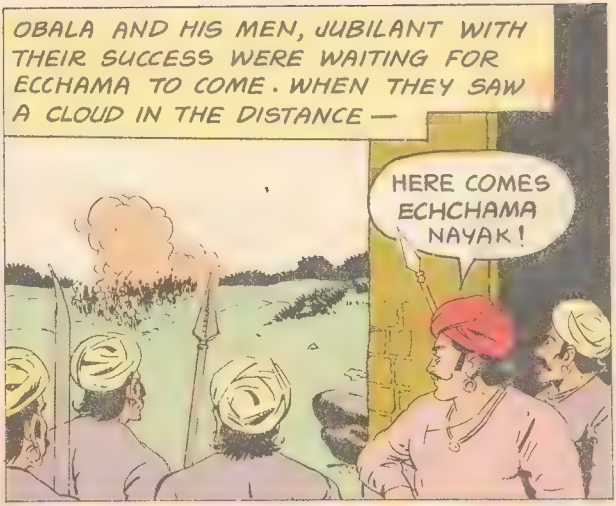
THE SOLDIERS WERE TAKEN BY SURPRISE AND SOON THREE OF THE FOUR GATES OF THE FORT WERE IN OBALA'S POSSESSION.

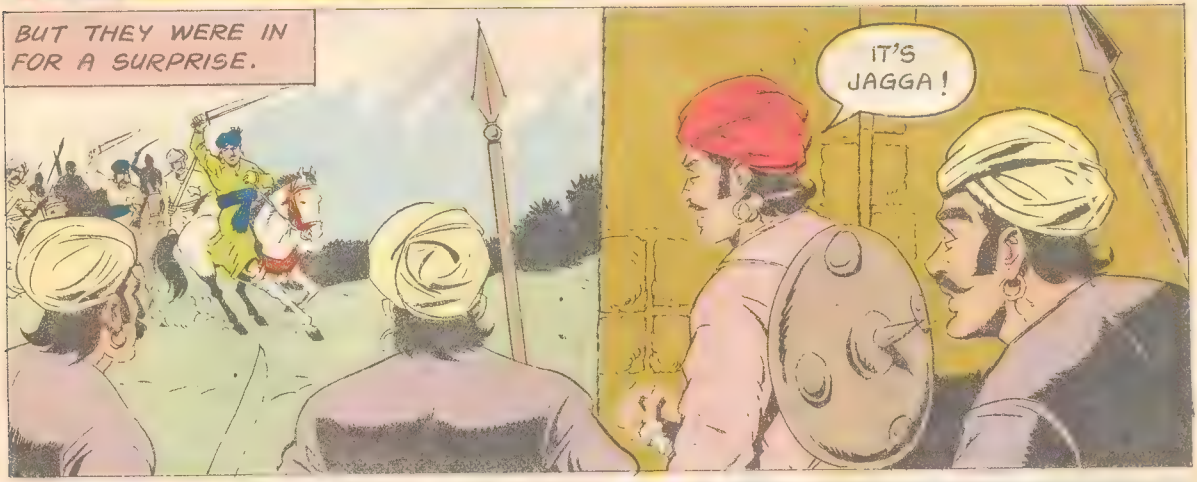
GO TO ECHCHAMA!

TELL HIM TO COME QUICKLY WITH THE REST OF OUR ARMY!

AS THE MESSENGER RODE AWAY...
...ANOTHER MESSENGER WAS ON HIS WAY TO JAGGARAYA.
ONE OF OUR MEN FROM THE FORT IS TRYING TO CATCH UP WITH US!
ECHCHAMA'S MEN ARE IN THE FORT!
THEY HAVE CAPTURED ALL THE GATES EXCEPT ONE!
A CURSE ON THAT MAN!

BACK TO THE FORT!


OBALA AND HIS MEN, JUBILANT WITH THEIR SUCCESS WERE WAITING FOR ECCHAMA TO COME. WHEN THEY SAW A CLOUD IN THE DISTANCE —
HERE COMES ECHCHAMA NAYAK!


BUT THEY WERE IN FOR A SURPRISE.
IT'S JAGGA!

ATTACK!

OBALA AND HIS MEN FOUGHT BRAVELY BUT THEY WERE OUTNUMBERED AND SOON ALL OF THEM WERE DEAD.

WHEN ECHCHAMA ARRIVED AT THE FORT ALL THE GATES WERE CLOSED...

...AND HE HAD TO WITHDRAW.

HOWEVER, ECHCHAMA'S BRAVE ATTEMPT HAD SHAKEN JAGGARAYA'S MEN INCLUDING HIS OWN BROTHER.

ECHCHAMA WILL NEVER GIVE UP HIS EFFORTS TO RESCUE SRIRANGA.

ONLY AS LONG AS SRIRANGA IS ALIVE.

YOU MEAN...?

YES. WE'LL PUT HIM OUT OF THE WAY! FOR EVER! AND YOU WILL DO IT.

THAT NIGHT JAGGARAYA'S BROTHER VISITED THE PRISON.
YOUR ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE IS A CRIME.

FIRST YOU LET YOUR SON ESCAPE BUT WE LET THAT PASS.

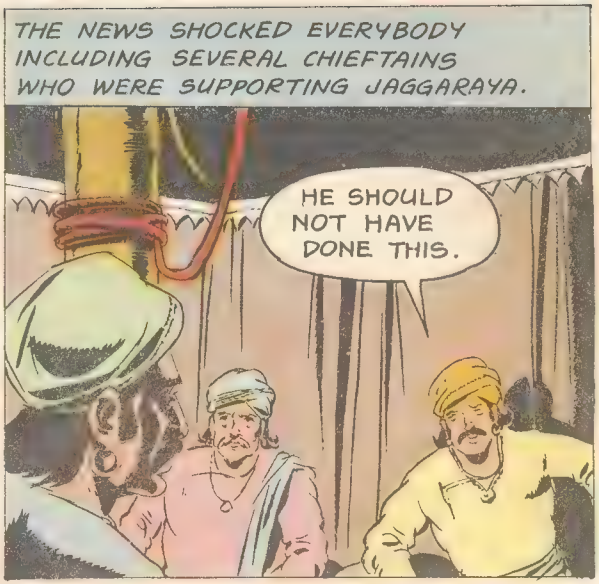
THEN YOU TRIED TO ESCAPE WITH YOUR WHOLE FAMILY...
I HAVE NO DEFENCE TO OFFER.

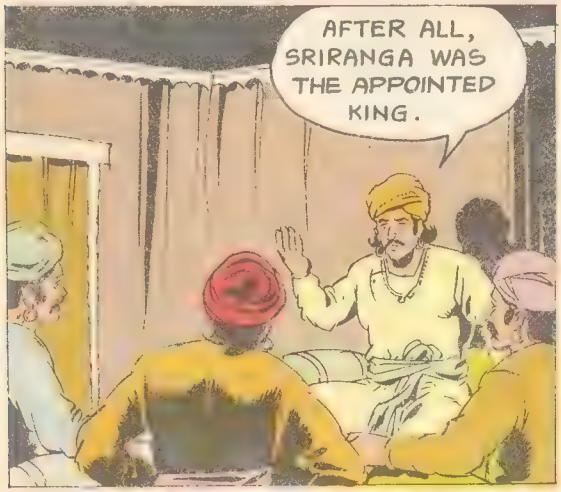
I AM NOT AFRAID OF YOUR PUNISHMENTS.
IT'S NOT ONLY YOURSELF.

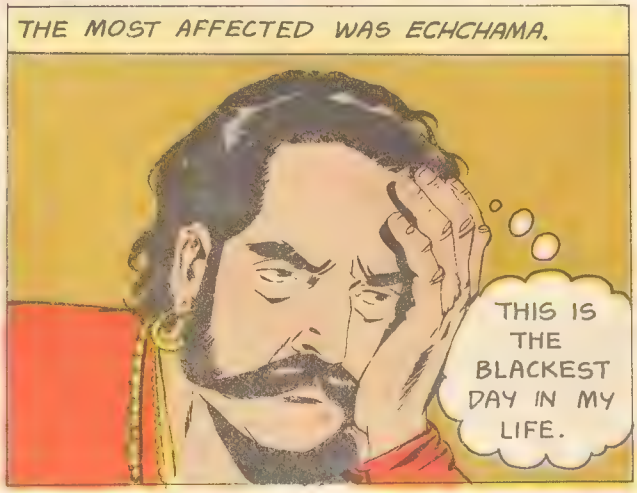
YOUR WHOLE FAMILY STANDS CONDEMNED.
THEN I HAVE ONLY ONE REQUEST TO MAKE OF YOU.

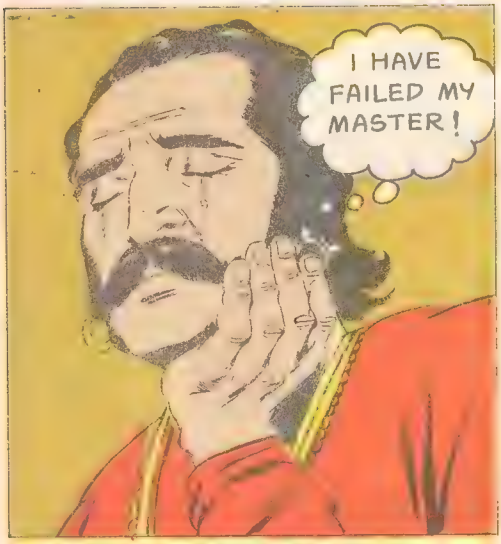
LET MINE BE THE HAND THAT PUTS MY FAMILY TO SLEEP.

WITH HIS OWN HANDS SRIRANGA TOOK THE LIVES OF HIS WIFE AND HIS TWO SONS AND THEN TURNED THE SWORD ON HIMSELF.


THE NEWS SHOCKED EVERYBODY INCLUDING SEVERAL CHIEFTAINS WHO WERE SUPPORTING JAGGARAYA.
HE SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS.


AFTER ALL, SRIRANGA WAS THE APPOINTED KING.

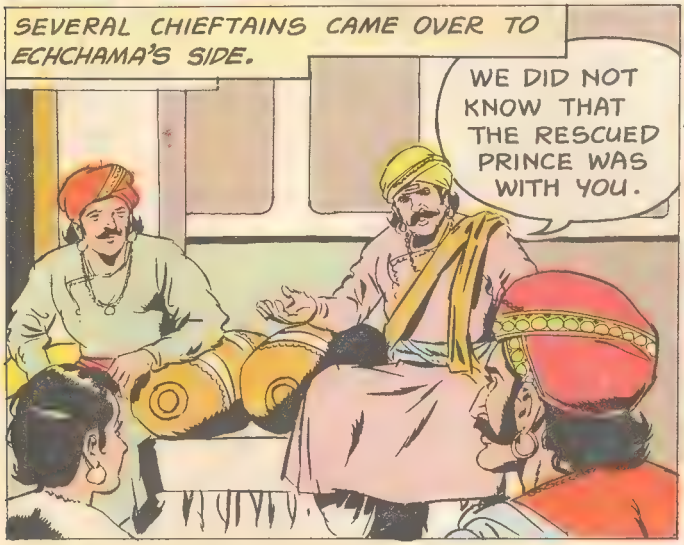

THE MOST AFFECTED WAS ECHCHAMA.
THIS IS THE BLACKEST DAY IN MY LIFE.


I HAVE FAILED MY MASTER!

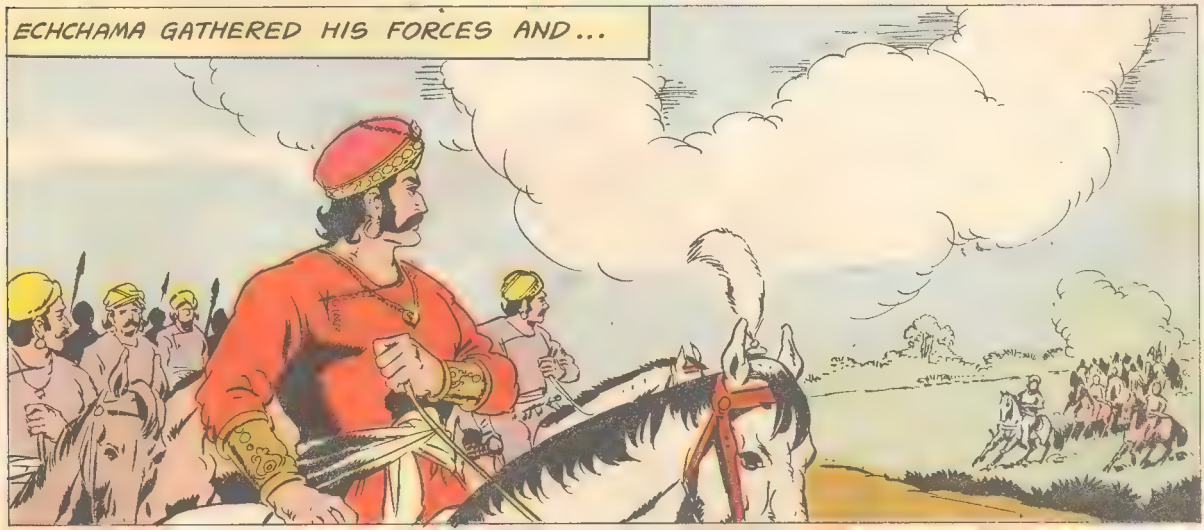
YOU SHALL NOT ESCAPE MY WRATH, JAGGARAYA!

LET ALL THE CHIEFTAINS KNOW THAT I HAVE SRIRANGARAYA'S SON WITH ME!

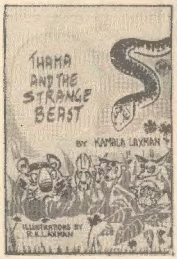
LET ALL THOSE WHO ARE LOYAL TO THE RIGHTFUL KING, JOIN FORCES WITH ME.


SEVERAL CHIEFTAINS CAME OVER TO ECHCHAMA'S SIDE.
WE DID NOT KNOW THAT THE RESCUED PRINCE WAS WITH YOU.

WE SHALL FIGHT FOR HIM!


ECHCHAMA GATHERED HIS FORCES AND...

* JAGGARAYA WAS KILLED LATER IN ANOTHER BATTLE WITH ECHCHAMA NAYAK.



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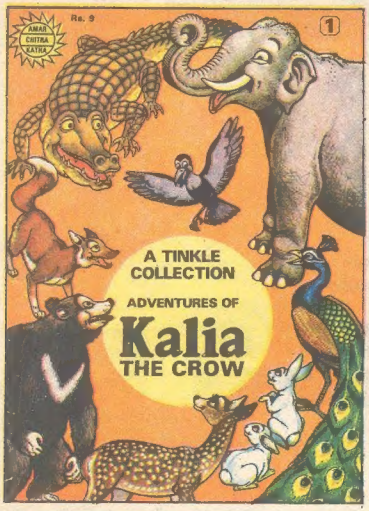

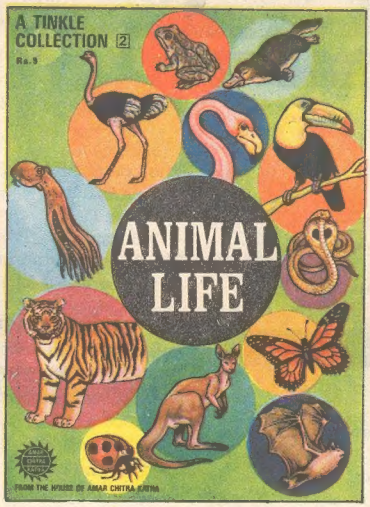

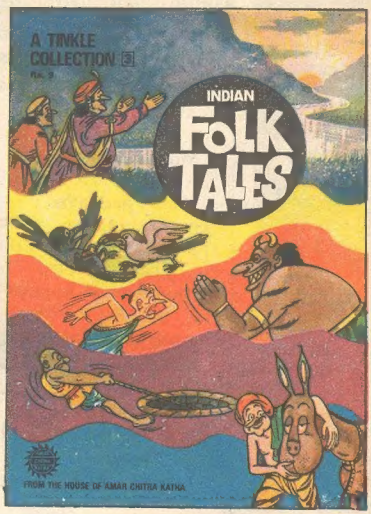

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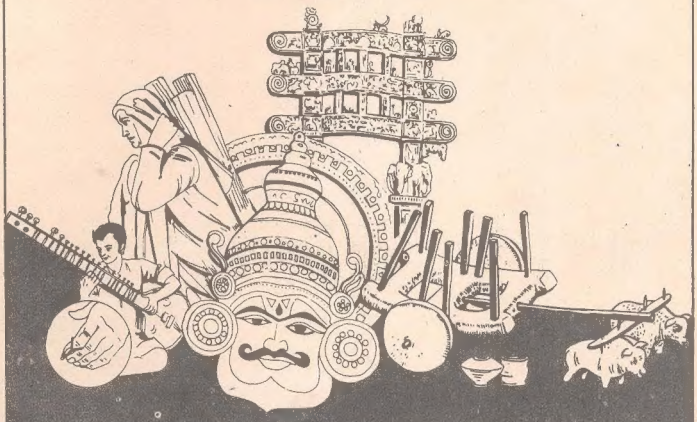

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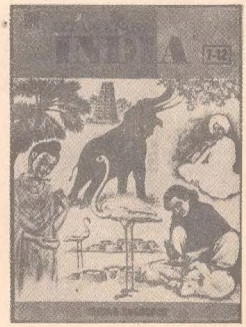

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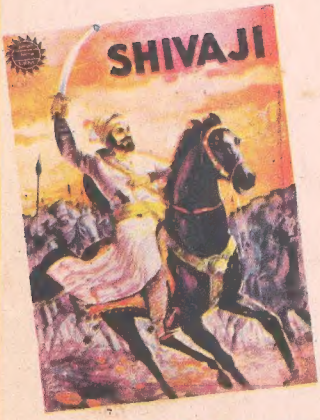

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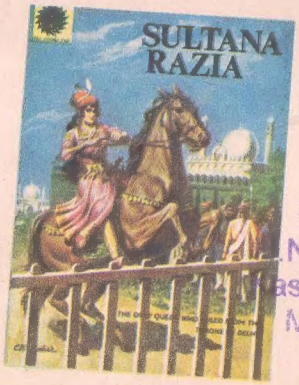

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